Prep Alumni Bring Educational Opportunity to Rural, Low-Income Mississippi Communities

Members of the Class of 2016 returned to campus to act on the ethos "Men for Others" by launching an effort that is now providing crucial educational opportunities to high school students from some of America's most disadvantaged communities.

The Global Teaching Project provides promising high school students in rural and low-income communities access to the advanced courses they need to achieve their full potential, but their schools do not offer, due to both a lack of resources and a chronic, and worsening, shortage of teachers, particularly in advanced STEM courses.

GTP provides underserved students comprehensive STEM classes in a blended format, which utilizes multiple means to engage students and is far more comprehensive than on-line or distance learning.

The blended classes feature a lead instructor who is an experienced teacher and renowned subject matter expert and who presents material largely through video. In-class instructors build on subject matter taught by the lead teacher, implementing lesson plans and providing additional instruction. Certified supervisory teachers create the curriculum for each class, maintain an online course platform, and support in-class instructors with detailed course outlines and pedagogical guidance. College student tutors from prominent universities are assigned to each class and conduct regular live tutoring sessions, typically by videoconference. Students also are provided leading textbooks, workbooks, and substantial online resources. Students prepare for the rigor of the advanced material through university-based, residential Summer and Spring programs, where they develop the substantive foundation and study skills needed to succeed.

GTP is now in its second year implementing a pilot program in rural, low-income school districts in Mississippi, the nation's most impoverished state, including districts serving communities with the highest overall and school-age poverty rates of the state's 82 counties.

The pilot program's inaugural course, AP Physics 1, was created in the Father George Center, where a professional production crew filmed classes taught by Professor Meg Urry, director of the Yale Center for Astronomy and

Nikita Demir '16 and Brian Dolan '16 at GTP workshop

Astrophysics, to students from Georgetown Prep, Holton Arms, Holy Cross, Visitation, and Bethesda-Chevy Chase.

Nikita Demir '16, Brian Dolan '16, and **Justin Helfgott '16**—now at Stanford, Yale, and Clemson, respectively—serve as tutors, working with Mississippi students both remotely by videoconferences and in person at the residential programs, which are hosted by Mississippi State and the University of Mississippi.

Their efforts already are yielding dividends. In its first year, GTP succeeded in increasing the number of Mississippi public schools offering AP Physics 1 by 30 percent, a figure that understates the initiative's impact in most of the State because existing AP programs were largely limited to a few, relatively affluent and populous areas. Last May, students from participating schools were the first in the history of their high schools to take the AP Physics 1 exam, a challenge that less than one-half of one percent of Mississippi public high school students took on.

Students taught by the Georgetown Prep tutors also have shown remarkable progress in learning the rigorous subject matter. As noted in a release from Mississippi State:

Students [in the] AP Physics preparatory program…achieved dramatic gains in substantive understanding of course content, according to nationally recognized pre- and post-program assessments utilized by the American Association of Physics Teachers.

The unique breadth of the Mississippi pilot program—which utilizes multiple components of instruction—has begun to draw national attention.

In the fall of 2018, U.S. Secretary of Education DeVos came to Holmes County, the state's poorest, to observe the pilot program and assess its potential for scaling broadly. Secretary DeVos viewed a sample of the Physics classes produced at Prep and met with students, teachers, and administrators from 10 school districts involved with the program.

Among those present was Brian Dolan, the tutor for the Holmes Physics class, who participated in a roundtable discussion with the Secretary on ways to address disparate access to advanced courses for students in rural and low-income areas.

Additional school districts continue to be added to the pilot program, and efforts are underway to expand the initiative to underserved areas elsewhere and to implement additional courses.

As the initiative ascends, Georgetown Prep alumni will remain central to the effort, and continue to make a positive impact on the lives of students who have the aptitude and work ethic needed to excel academically, but had been denied the opportunity to do so. As one Mississippi student wrote to his school district superintendent:

"I would like to personally thank you for the opportunity to attend the AP Physics I Preparatory Academy over the course of the previous two weeks. Through this camp, I learned much about the curriculum involved with physics and its basic principles, but I learned something much more important: never think a dream is too big.

At this camp were two counselors [from Georgetown Prep] who attend two very prestigious universities: Stanford and Yale. Through all the classes, they were present and willing to assist in our understanding of the curriculum being taught. These two brilliant young men have given me appropriate role models to strive to match in success. In fact, I am considering following in their footsteps and diving deeper into the concepts of physics and its beautiful intricacies."

Georgetown Prep's Year of Discernment seeks "to advance the work of reconciliation and justice". Through efforts such as the Mississippi pilot program, the Prep community is working to bring about positive change by serving some of the persons and areas most burdened by the odious legacy of injustice.